DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 700 CG 012 317

AUTHOR Milardo, Robert M.; Murstein, Bernard I.
TITLE The Implications of Exchange Orientation on the Dyadic Functioning of Heterosexual Cohabitors.
PUB DATE 8 Sep 77
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Love and Attraction (Swansea, Wales, September 8, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attachment Behavior; College Students; Expectation; *Friendship; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Perception; Research Projects; *Sex Differences; *Social Exchange Theory; Social Relations
IDENTIFIERS *Romantic Relationship

ABSTRACT

An investigation was conducted with 20 cohabiting dyads (total N=40) to assess the implications of exchange orientation (EO) on dyadic functioning. EO was defined as the degree to which individual members of the dyad seek reciprocity from their partner. Most individuals tend to be quite sensitive to their own work input within the dyad, but are less sensitive to the contribution of their partner. This perceptual imbalance becomes a problem only if the individual believes that a 50-50 "work" or "privileges" approach is necessary for his/her satisfaction within the dyadic relationship. As predicted, the results demonstrated an inverse relationship between exchanged orientation and dyadic functioning. Although EO was found to be a more critical variable for females in their dyadic functioning, high EO for both sexes proved to be inimical to pair commitment. Additional analyses demonstrated that for females, interactions with friendship networks tended to enhance dyadic functioning, while the reverse was true for males. Differential effects for males and females were interpreted in terms of traditional role patterns and expectations. (Author)

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The Implications of Exchange Orientation on the Dyadic Functioning of Heterosexual Cohabitors

Robert M. Milardo

The Pennsylvania State University

and

Bernard I. Murstein

Connecticut College

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Paper presented at the International Conference on Love and Attraction, Swansea, Wales, September 8, 1977.

Robert M. Milardo, M.A., is a doctoral candidate in the Division of Individual and Family Studies, College of Human Development, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA; 16802.

Bernard I. Murstein, Ph.D., is Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Psychology, Connecticut College, New London, CT; 06320.

The authors wish to extend thanks to Zachariah C. Boukydis, David Factor, Ellen Kozac and Vincent Morello for their helpful suggestions in the preparation of this manuscript.

CG012312

Abstract

An investigation was conducted with twenty cohabiting dyads (total N=40) to assess the implications of exchange orientation (EO) on dyadic functioning. EO was defined as the degree to which individual members of the dyad seek reciprocity from their partner. Most individuals tend to be quite sensitive to their own work input within the dyad, but are less sensitive to the contribution of their partner. This perceptual imbalance only becomes a problem if the individual believes that a fifty-fifty "work" or "privileges" approach is necessary for his/her satisfaction within the dyadic relationship. As predicted, the results demonstrated an inverse relationship between exchange orientation and dyadic functioning. Although EO was found to be a more critical variable for females in their dyadic functioning, high EO for both sexes proved to be inimical to pair commitment. Additional analyses demonstrated that for females, interactions with friendship networks tended to enhance dyadic functioning, while the reverse was true for males. Differential effects for males and females were interpreted in terms of traditional role patterns and expectations.

The Implications of Exchange Orientation on the Dyadic Functioning of Heterosexual Cohabitors

Currently, social exchange theory suggests that in any social encounter between two individuals the initiator of the social action will try to maximize profits (rewards minus costs).[1] In doing so, initiators will assess their own assets and liabilities to be applied in determining the profitability to the target person (Gergen, 1969; Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). This model is both hedonistic, in that the individuals will try to maximize their own profits, and homeostatic, as individuals will associate only with those whose net profitability is approximately balanced with their own (Murstein, 1971, 1976). However, the extent and manner in which any individual in a set of social encounters seeks a balanced exchange may be of critical importance for the progress of the relationship. For example, if one were to keep a strict account of work input, it is doubtful that a balanced ledger would ensue. The reason being that many individuals can never recognize a balanced exchange, since they are more aware of what they do for others than what others do for them. This particular dimension of reciprocity in social exchange is measured by the Murstein Exchange Orientation Scale (Murstein, MacDonald & Cerreto, 1977).

Exchange orientation is defined as the degree to which individual members of the dyad seek reciprocity from their partner in goods, services, privileges, and demonstrations of affection. A person high in exchange orientation would expect an egocentric equality in exchange on

an item-by-item basis. For example, such an individual would expect an evening out on the town if his or her partner did so. In speaking of egocentricity we refer to the evaluation of the actor which typically neglects the individuality of the partner's needs. Thus the primary emphasis is on an equivalent or itemized exchange (in this example, of privileges). The highly exchange oriented individual not only rejects another's individuality of expression but the possibility that his own expression of needs may be qualitatively different. It is as if the highly exchanged oriented individual is unaware that the expression of needs may be different from one individual to another. An individual low in exchange orientation would be more amenable to a mutually compatible equity in exchange without the item-by-item analysis present in the former type. The distinction is similar to that made by Rappoport and Rappoport (1975) where, in speaking of gender-specific role identification, the authors distinguished equality from equity. Equity is defined as a "fair allocation both of opportunities and of constraints. . . and thus allowing for the possibility of (variation) rather than (compulsory) adherence to a new stereotype" (p. 421). The notion of equity allows for the possibility of inequality in the sense of 'not the same' as long as such an arrangement is freely adopted by the individuals concerned. Therefore, a relationship based on an equity principle would allow for the differential expression of needs. This would be entirely incompatible with a highly exchange oriented individual whose prime concern is the equality of exchanges rather than equity in

exchanges. In fact, equality can never be achieved within a relationship since the needs, wants, and desires of the actors are idiosyncratic. However, it would be possible for equity to exist in relationships and certainly desirable. Such relationships would, by definition, be characterized by inequality simply because of individual differences in needs, or in the satisfaction of similar needs. Therefore should the actor look at the process, he or she may find equity. However, should the components of the process (i.e., goods, services or privileges) be analyzed, inequality would be found, irrespective of the particular bias of the observer involved.

It is this particular attitudinal dimension of the reciprocal exchange process which is of concern here. Those individuals who are primarily concerned with equality of exchange will have difficulty in dyadic maintenance and development for essentially two reasons: 1) typically the actor's subjective assessment of a set of social encounters is egocentric, and 2) because the individual's needs, wants, and desires are idiosyncratic, an absolute equality in exchanges of goods, services, privileges, and demonstrations of affection will be virtually unattainable.

We may further differentiate individuals on a temporal dimension with those high in exchange orientation expecting a more immediate reciprocity in exchanges. This position (high exchange) may be of value in initial encounters and friendships and yet be detrimental to more intimate relationships. Several researchers have noted the reciprocal

nature of the exchange process in encounters between strangers and to some extent friendships (see Altman & Taylor, 1973; Cozby, 1973). However, within intimate dyads it is more likely that reciprocity of exchange takes on a different meaning; one which is less exacting and temporally bound, and is based more on mutual interpersonal trust and commitment.

In the initial work of Murstein, MacDonald & Cerreto (1977), hypotheses were advanced linking high exchange orientation with low marital adjustment as measured by the Locke-Wallace short form marriage adjustment scale (1959). As predicted, marital adjustment correlated negatively with exchange orientation. Those individuals who were high in their expectations of reciprocal and immediate exchange tended to have rather low marital adjustment scores. In addition, a population of college undergraduates were solicited and both the exchange scale and the Murstein Friendship Intensity Scale were administered. As hypothesized, high exchange oriented individuals demonstrated greater friendship intensity than those low on exchange. Furthermore, in dyads where both individuals were high in exchange orientation friendship intensity was found to be greater than other dyadic combinations.

These results tend to support the tenet that an exchange orientation is inimical to marital adjustment and yet of some value in the initial developing friendship.

The present investigation focuses on several parameters of dyadic adjustment, development, and maintenance which have typically been

considered to be of critical importance (Lewis, 1973a). These parameters were measured by the Lewis Dyadic Formation Inventory (henceforth DFI).[2] This instrument, developed by Robert Lewis (see Lewis, 1972, 1973a, 1973b), had been previously employed with dating, engaged, and marital dyads. It was felt that this instrument would suit the needs of this research, for its use with cohabiting dyads had already been documented (Lewis, Spanier, Storm & LeHecka, Note 1).

Included in the DFI are eight scales which can be summarized as follows: Pair Commitment - the couple's determination to continue their relationship, Boundary Maintenance - the individual's preference for his/her companion to others and the degree to which third persons are excluded from the relationship, Pair Identification - the degree to which family members and friends see the couple as a pair, Value Consensus - a measure of the couple's similarity of values (e.g., aims and goals, philosophy of life, financial matters), Happiness with Other- a straightforward measure of the individual's overall satisfaction with his/her companion, Dyadic Functioning - a measure of the number of activities the couple do as a pair rather than autonomously, Total Dyadic Preference - a measure of the extent to which individuals prefer disclosure of significant events to partners rather than significant others, and Dyadic Crystallization - a global measure of the extent to which dyadic members function as, and are perceived by significant others to function as a unit.

Based on the arguments presented earlier, a negative relationship between exchange orientation and the various DFI indices would be hypothesized if cohabiting cross-sex dyads were considered more akin to engaged couples than friendships. Although several researchers have found cohabiting dyads to be lacking in dyadic commitment (Lyness, Lipetz & Davis, 1972; Arafat & Yorburg, 1973), these results are inconclusive at best. In the case of the Lyness et al. sample, some couples may have been attracted to offers of therapeutic intervention which they received. Similar results were reported by Arafat and Yorburg (1973), but again these results are inconclusive as both the Lyness and Arafat studies failed to adequately define cohabitation prior to the data collection. Researchers using the 'self' definition may be reporting on individuals who merely spend a few nights together irregularly, perhaps only following weekend dates. An accurate definition of cohabitation is needed. In the present research a variation of Macklin's (1972) definition was employed. As it was intended to select participants from a college population which had been in session for approximately two months, the definition was changed to reflect this. Thus cohabitors were defined as heterosexual couples who shared a bedroom for a minimum of four nights per week for at least two consecutive months (rather than three months as in the Macklin definition).

It is hypothesized that exchange orientation as in the case of married couples will be inimical to dyadic development and maintenance for cohabitors as measured by the various DFI scales, but with one

exception. We have predicted that Boundary Maintenance will vary positively with exchange orientation. The reasoning is that having many mutual friends (low Boundary Maintenance) may input additional resources thereby enhancing the relationship, while at the same time, easing the reliance of each partner on the other. A well functioning dyad may indeed actively maintain friendships rather than the reverse. It is therefore not surprising to find marital adjustment related to frequency of interaction for the couple and number of friendships for wives (Wittmershaus, 1974). To be sure, far from excluding third persons from their relationships, cohabitors tend to spend much of their time with mutual friends (Macklin, 1972).

Method

Research participants were gathered by a reputational method. In all, twenty-four couples were contacted. One couple refused to participate and three did not meet the requirements of our definition leaving a total of twenty couples who were finally interviewed (40 individuals).

All couples were required to make an appointment and visit the Psychology Department at a mutually agreeable time. Following a brief introduction, each was given a letter of instruction and a copy of the questionnaire. Participants were not allowed to talk with their companions or other couples during testing. Upon completion of the questionnaire each was given a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and allowed to ask questions.

Subjects. Participants were predominantly undergraduate students (90 percent). The mean age for males was 20.95 years and for females 20.57 years. By class there were freshmen 3%, sophomores 22%, juniors 30%, and seniors 45%. Using the females' estimates of how long the couple had known each other, 20 percent had been acquainted for less than one year, 50 percent for 1-2 years, 20 percent 2-3 years, and 10 percent over 4 years.

At least 70 percent spent every night with their companion while 20 percent indicated almost every night, and 10 percent four nights per week. Most couples had been cohabiting more than four months (70 percent) with many having done so for a year or more (50 percent).

Questionnaire. Along with the Lewis Dyadic Formation Inventory, an early version of the Exchange Orientation Scale developed by Murstein et al. was administered. This scale consists of eighteen items with a Likert format. The individual items were analyzed by determining the product moment correlations between each item and the combined total scores. Thirteen items were retained, being significant at the .05 level or below. Reliability was then determined by the split-half method yielding a Spearman-Brown coefficient of .87 (uncorrected .78).

Results

As predicted, the product moment correlations for the pooled individual scores between Exchange Orientation (EO) and Pair Commitment, Dyadic Crystallization, Value Consensus, Happiness with Other, and Total

Dyadic Preference were significant at the .06 level or well below (see Table 1). Individuals low in EO tended to be similar in values with

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Insert Table 1 about here

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respect to their partner, highly committed to their relationship, and to prefer their partner to significant others. In general, these individuals were relatively satisfied with their relationship.

Also as predicted, a significant positive correlation was evidenced between EO and Boundary Maintenance. Individuals low on EO tended to socialize with other couples frequently, and enjoy the company of mutual as well as separate friends. On a related measure, Dyadic Functioning or the degree to which individuals function and socialize primarily with their partner or autonomously, no significant correlation was found with the EO scale. Whether or not individuals attended parties, visited relatives, or studied, either separately or together, did not influence the degree of exchange reciprocity.

In regards to Pair Identification, no significant correlation was found with EO. As the reader may recall the Pair Identification scale measures the degree to which family members and friends see the dyad as unique. Items comprising this scale assessed the frequency with which individuals were invited to various social functions (e.g., parties, weddings, and family vacations) as a couple. As in the case of Dyadic Functioning, exchange reciprocity seems to be unrelated to Pair Identification.

The data were further analyzed by sex with correlations computed between EO and the various DFI indices. For females, correlations of the DFI indices with EO were generally similar in magnitude though slightly higher than those for the total sample (see Table 1). However, for males all correlations except those between EO, and the criterion variables Pair Commitment and Dyadic Crystallization were insignificant. To assess whether there were inherent differences in mean scores and hence, the distribution of scores for males and females, Student's *t*-tests were computed for all indices. No significant differences between the two groups were demonstrated for mean scores on EO ($t(18)=1.13$) or, in fact on any of the dependent variables. That is, neither group tended to score higher than the other on EO or the DFI indices. This being the case, it would seem that high exchange orientation is a more critical variable for the dyadic formation and maintenance of females as compared with males. However, it should be noted that in terms of commitment to the relationship, correlations for both males and females were found to be of the order of .70, indicating that for both sexes high EO is associated with low commitment. Certainly, the degree of commitment is an important factor in the development, maintenance and functioning of any intimate relationship.

Concerning the issue of the effects of mutual and separate friendships on dyadic functioning for males versus females, an additional analysis was performed by computing correlations between Boundary Maintenance and the remaining DFI indices (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

As is readily apparent in all cases, Boundary Maintenance is negatively correlated with the DFI indices for females, and contrarily, positively so for males. This discrepancy can not be explained by positing lower overall dyadic functioning (adjustment) for females as it has already been shown that no significant differences exist between mean scores for either sex on the various DFI indices. Thus, for females, it would seem that the maintenance of extra-dyadic friendships is associated with higher overall dyadic functioning. Whereas the reverse is the case for males in that the exclusion of third persons seems to be positively related to dyadic functioning.

Discussion

As hypothesized, the results demonstrated an inverse relationship between exchange orientation and dyadic functioning and maintenance. Exchange orientation is defined as the degree to which individuals seek reciprocity in exchanges of goods, services, privileges, and demonstrations of affection. Essentially, individuals high on this dimension may be conceptualized as seeking <u>equality</u> in the components of the social exchange process. This particular view is detrimental to the maintenance and enhancement of the relationship as the actors' subjective assessments of a set of social encounters is egocentric. Individual needs, wants, and desires are also sufficiently idiosyncratic to render unbalanced any itemized comparison of exchanges.

On the contrary, it may well be that the establishment of equity within a relationship may be quite positive in enhancing dyadic functioning. Such a relationship would be characterized by reciprocity in the exchange process rather than the components of that process. Exemplary might be a couple who held mutual expectations concerning the open communication of feelings, thoughts, and experiences, but allowed for the differential expression both in substance, and in temporal sequence. Such a dyad might allow one member to express the need for anonymity by engaging in a dramatic class one evening per week, while the other member finds no need whatsoever for anonymity in leisure time pursuits. The principle of exchange operating here would be, by definition, equity. Similarly, our prototypical dyad may demonstrate reciprocity in social exchange by holding similar expectations in regards to certain more general dimensions of the relationship, for example, mutual trust, and commitment. However, the actual demonstration of these dimensions may be rather inequitable when, in the eyes of the actor-participant (or experimenter), an immediacy of exchange and/or equality of expression is sought. In our view, actor-participants must allow, at certain times, for differential expression of trust and commitment, both in substance and in temporal sequence.

In more general terms, the results clearly suggest that in future investigations of reciprocity and social exchange theory the researcher must specify the type of relationship of concern (e.g., intimate friendship, or romantic relationship), and additionally more exacting

specifications of the characteristics and dimensions of reciprocity. We have suggested three possible dimensions as relevant to the construct of reciprocity: 1) the degree of component versus process evaluation by the actor, 2) an equity or equality orientation, and 3) a temporal dimension. Further research will perhaps suggest additional parameters of critical importance.

In regard to sex differences, the data suggest that exchange orientation is a more neutral variable for males as compared with females on several DFI indices. However, EO was more detrimental to marital adjustment for <u>males</u> rather than females in the Murstein et al. sample with a mean age of 38 years. This is contrary to findings for the cohabiting sample with a mean age of 21 years. Yet this apparent paradox may be interpreted in terms of a cohort effect. That is, given womens' changing roles and new emphasis on equality between the sexes, we might expect <u>women</u>, among the cohort represented herein, to be more conscious of reciprocity in a dyadic relationship. Such an orientation may be contrary to traditional role models and hence, inimical to dyadic functioning. However, with nonsignificant mean differences between the sexes on EO, such an explanation remains to be more specifically verified by further research.

Additionally, the inverse relationship between Boundary Maintenance and the remaining DFI indices certainly deserves further consideration as this finding is contrary to predictions generated by current theories of intimate relationships. It has been proposed by several theorists

that dyadic development and functioning is enhanced by the exclusion of friendships (e.g., Lewis, 1973a), or at least a reduction in the friendship network (Huston & Levinger, 1978). However, as previously suggested, researchers have demonstrated that marital adjustment is positively related to the number of friendships for the wife (Wittmershaus, 1974). Our data would seem to support this finding. Furthermore, Macklin (1972) has reported that cohabitors do not avoid friendships with third persons, but rather they tend to maintain many mutual friends. It is worth noting that the Macklin sample was composed entirely of females, and may therefore further corroborate our findings. This differential effect of friendships on dyadic functioning for males and females does not seem to be entirely an age related or situationally determined effect peculiar to the dormitory raised college student. However, as our data do not allow for further analysis, for example concerning the number of mutual versus separate friendships, the intimacy of such friendships, or the sex composition, the meaning of this sex difference is not at all clear. Although several social scientists have implicated the importance of investigating the effects of the social network on dyadic functioning much work remains yet to be done (see Ridley & Avery, 1977; Secord, 1977).

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1. Lewis, R. A., Spanier, G. B., Storm, U. L., & LeHecka, C. F. Commitment in married and unmarried cohabitation. Paper presented in the Family Section at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, August 27, 1975.

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Footnotes

Reprint requests and other correspondence may be posted to Robert M. Milardo, Division of Individual and Family Studies, College of Human Development, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA; 16802.

[1]Rarely are interactions between more than two individuals considered and this in of itself represents a problem.

[2]Items comprising the Locke-Wallace marital adjustment inventory, employed in the Murstein, Goyette, and Cerreto study, are included within the DFI in nearly identical form. However, the DFI expands on the dimensions presented in the Locke-Wallace inventory in addition to adding several new scales.

Table 1

Correlations between Exchange Orientation and the Dyadic Formation Indices

	Total Sample[a]	Males[b]	Females[b]
Pair Commitment	-.69 (.001)[c]	-.70 (.001)	-.70 (.001)
Boundary Maintenance	.30 (.03)	.11	.42 (.03)
Pair Identification	-.03	.19	-.15
Dyadic Crystallization	-.25 (.06)	-.35 (.06)	-.31
Value Consensus	-.43 (.003)	-.27	-.73 (.001)
Happiness with Other	-.51 (.001)	-.30	-.72 (.001)
Dyadic Functioning	.08	.19	-.006
Total Dyadic Preference	-.33 (.02)	-.26	-.35 (.06)

[a] N=40.

[b] N=20.

[c] Probability levels are included within parentheses.

Table 2

Correlations between Boundary Maintenance and the DFI indices

	Females[a]	Males
Pair Commitment	-.52 (.009)[b]	.30
Pair Identification	-.13	.12
Dyadic Crystallization	-.26	.48 (.017)
Value Consensus	-.38 (.05)	.23
Happiness with Other	-.17	.21
Dyadic Functioning	-.34	.47 (.018)
Total Dyadic Preference	-.41 (.04)	.39 (.05)

[a]For both groups N=20.

[b]Probability levels are included within parentheses.